**Girls Rising – One at a time!**

Catherine Mc Auley the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, once said, “

**The Poor need help today, not next week.”**

We who are connected to The Partnership for Global Justice at the United Nations in New York City, echo Catherine’s words in saying,

**“Girls around the world who suffer gender based violence and exclusion need help today, not next week.”**

**In the Spirit of Catheirine McAuley and animated by the Gospel and Jesus’ passion for the poor, we too commit to act in solidarity with girls suffering exclusion, lack of opportunity, violence because of their gender, denial of human rights, forced marriages, rape.**

In the words of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan,

“there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls”, 66 million girls are missing out on the education that could transform their own lives and the world around them”.

In too many parts of the world, girls experience “apartheid of gender”. Beginning from birth their fundamental rights are denied and violated. The low value placed on girls subjects them to exclusion, exploitation and violence.

Lack of access to education and adequate health care, sexual abuse, female genital cutting, and too early child bearing are some obstacles that impede their full development and deprive millions of girls of the opportunity to play a productive and equal role in their societies.

Girls are the women of tomorrow. Too often the deprivations and inequalities suffered by them are accepted as their preparation for womanhood. The continuity of traditional inequities will make it impossible for girls and women to contribute to the fundamental changes needed for creating more equitable societies and sustainable development.

Who are We and Why do we Care?

We are an international network. We have a history of success and we will not stop until every girl has an opportunity to attend school. Every year we focus on an issue that directly affects girls and then work to do something concrete to make a difference one girl at a time. To date, we have examined poverty, water issues, trafficking, violence against girls. We have built a school in Cambodia; provided hundreds of scholarship and opportunities for girls in different parts of the globe; refurbished a kitchen and library in St. Michael’s school in the Murkuru slums in Nairobi, Kenya; provided money to safe houses for girls and women trafficked and in the past year a new school is being built for the Nuba Mountain children of Sudan.

Some facts:

* Did you know that October 11 has been declared the International Day for Girls?
* Did you know that on October 16th, 2012 masked men entered a school bus and asked for Malala Yousafzai by name. They shot her in the head and neck – “Let this be a lesson,” a spokeman for the Pakistani Taliban said afterwards. “Girls have no right to school”. They shot a 14-year-old girl because an educated girl sheds light on the darkness and myths about woman and girls can be unpicked when girls are educated.
* Did you know that Child Marriages are on the increase? Girls who marry between the ages of 10 and 14 are five times as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth as women in their early 20s.
* Did you know that poor families sell their children into marriage either to settle debts or to make some money and escape the cycle of poverty.
* Did you know that in some cultures **"Protecting" the girl's sexuality means** marrying a girl young girl will protect the family’s honor.

**Inadequate laws:** Many countries such as Pakistan have laws against child marriage. The laws are not enforced. In Afghanistan, a [new law](http://middleeast.about.com/od/afghanistan/a/me0904150.htm) was written into the country's code enabling Shiite, or [Hazara](http://middleeast.about.com/od/glossary/g/me080825a.htm), communities to impose their own form of family law--including permitting child marriage.

**Trafficking:** Poor families are tempted to sell their girls not just into marriage, but into prostitution, as the transaction enables large sums of money to change hands.

**Case Study: A Child Bride Speaks**

The following testimony from a child bride:

"I was married to a nine-year-old boy when I was three. At that point of time, I was unaware of marriages. I don't even remember my marriage event. I just remember that as I was too young and was unable to walk and they had to carry me and bring me over to his place. I had to carry water in a small clay-pot in the mornings. I had to sweep and wash the floor everyday.

" I had to be satisfied with the amount of food that I was provided. I never got to eat enough. I sometimes secretly ate corns, soybeans, etc that used to grow in the field. And if I was caught eating, my inlaws and husband would beat me up accusing me of stealing from the field and eating. I had one black blouse and a cotton sari torn into two pieces. I had to wear these for two years.”

"My husband married three times after me. At present, he lives with his youngest wife. I had the first of 7 children when I was 11. As a result, I now have severe back problems. I wish I could run away but I am afraid that they will catch me.” Zola aged 20

* If current levels of child marriages hold, 14.2 million girls annually or 39,000 daily will marry too young.
* Despite the physical damage and the persistent discrimination to young girls, little progress has been made toward ending the practice of child marriage. In fact, the problem threatens to increase, with the expanding youth population in the developing world and lack of awareness raising in the developed world.
* Girls married young are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence and sexual abuse than those who marry later.

[](http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Yemeni-child-bride.png)

Tahani, 8, is seen with her husband Majed, 27, and her former classmate Ghada, 8, and her husband of 29, outside their home in Hajjah, Yemen, 26 July, 2012.

Photo Credit: © Stephanie Sinclair/VII/Tooyoungtowed.org

Most child marriages take place in rural sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Child marriage is increasingly recognized as a violation of the rights of girls for the following reasons:

* **A complex issue with deep roots**

Child marriage, which has existed for centuries, is a complex issue, rooted deeply in gender inequality, tradition and poverty. The practice is most common in rural and impoverished areas, where prospects for girls can be limited. In many cases, parents arrange these marriages and young girls have no choice.

* Poor families marry off young daughters to reduce the number of children they need to feed, clothe and educate. In some cultures, a major incentive is the price prospective husbands will pay for young brides.

**How we can help?**

* Raise awareness about this issue.
* Recognize that while we cannot save every girl we can help some girls.
* Watch the movie Girl’s Rising and organize a viewing in your own school/academy.
* Write an article for your local newspaper/school magazine about why education is so important for the girl child.

**Join the 2013-2014 campaign – Girls Rising – one girl at a time.**

**What is our focus this year?**